

Katharina Gross | Gerold Gruber (Ed.)

WILHELM GROSZ

An Unsung Protagonist
of Viennese Modernism



böhlau



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Exilarte Zentrum der mdw – Universität für Musik und darstellende Kunst Wien
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Bibliografische Information der Deutschen Nationalbibliothek :
Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek verzeichnet diese Publikation
in der Deutschen Nationalbibliografie; detaillierte bibliografische
Daten sind im Internet über <http://dnb.d-nb.de> abrufbar.

© 2026 Böhlau, Zeltgasse 1, A-1080 Wien, ein Imprint der Brill-Gruppe
(Koninklijke Brill NV, Leiden, Niederlande; Brill USA Inc., Boston MA, USA; Brill Asia Pte Ltd, Singapore;
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Gestaltung, Layout und Satz: Iby-Jolande Varga
Lektorat: Annika Thür
Umschlagsfotos: © A-Weaz
Druck und Bindung: Finidr, Český Těšín
Printed in the EU

Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht Verlage | www.vandenhoeck-ruprecht-verlage.com
E-Mail: info@boehlau-verlag.com
ISBN 978-3-205-22399-3 (Print)
ISBN 978-3-205-22400-6 (E-Book)
ISBN 978-3-205-22401-3 (E-Lib)



Wilhelm Grosz standing by the piano
Archive of the Exilarte Center at the
mdw Vienna (A-Weaz)

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1. INTRODUCTION

„Wegen der Operette höre ich hoffentlich recht bald von Ihnen, ich könnte nur letzte März tage nach Wien kommen, da ich anfangs bei den Proben in Hannover sein muss, wo ich den Klavierpart in der Premiere spiele. Nun aber endgültig Schluss für heute. Herzliche Grüße von Haus zu Haus. Ihr Wilhelm Grosz“¹

This quote is taken from a letter written by the Viennese composer Wilhelm Grosz to the publishing house *Universal Edition* in 1928 – one of over 500 surviving documents of correspondence between Grosz and *Universal Edition*. The entire collection is now preserved in the Wienbibliothek im Rathaus (Vienna City Library at City Hall). These letters vividly illustrate the working life of a man striving to establish himself as a composer in the cultural scene of the time. At the time of this letter, Grosz was already living and working in Berlin. After studying in Vienna under Franz Schreker and Guido Adler and working there for several years as a freelance composer, he, like many other music creators during the interwar period, sought professional opportunities in Germany, because the economic crisis had drastically reduced employment prospects in Austria.

Wilhelm Grosz, like numerous others in the music and cultural world prior to World War II, was of Jewish descent. Following the rise to power of the National Socialists in Germany in 1933, Grosz returned to Vienna with his wife Elisabeth, his approximately three-year-old daughter Eva Annelise, and his stepson Peter. There, he assumed the position of musical di-

rector at the *Wiener Kammerspiele* until 1934. When the political situation became increasingly precarious in Austria too, the young family fled to London. In Vienna and Berlin Grosz had primarily composed “serious music”, although he often already incorporated elements of jazz into his works. In contrast, he created mainly popular music in London. Grosz became a successful composer of popular songs and is today most likely remembered for titles such as *Isle of Capri*, *Red Sails in the Sunset*, and *Harbour Lights*. Hoping to establish himself in the American film industry, Grosz and his wife emigrated to New York in 1938, where he died in 1939 at the age of 45 from a heart attack.

His “serious” works, some of which were performed by prominent conductors such as Felix Weingartner, Franz von Hoëßlin, and Willem Mengelberg, have largely fallen into obscurity.

The *Exilarte – Zentrum für verfolgte Musik* (Exilarte - Center for Persecuted Music) has made it its mission to serve as a point of contact for the preservation and research of cultural heritage that had been lost for many years due to the atrocities of the National Socialists. To date, over 40 estates,

1 Wilhelm Grosz, Letter to *Universal Edition*, no. 185, 17 March 1928, Vienna City Library, p. 6.

Translation into English: “Regarding the operetta, I hope to hear from you quite soon. I could only come to Vienna during the last days of March, as I have to attend the rehearsals in Hanover in the beginning, where I will be playing the piano part at the premiere. But now, finally, enough for today. Warm regards from house to house. Yours, Wilhelm Grosz.”

among them those of Erich Zeisl, Hans Gál, and Julius Bürger, are housed in the Exilarte Archive at the University of Music and Performing Arts of Vienna. The estate of Wilhelm Grosz was also entrusted to the Center by his grandchildren Jean Valerie Forman, Diane Forman-Berg, William Grosz Forman, and Roger Stuart Forman.

This publication explores, among other aspects, the artistic circles in which Grosz moved during the 1920s. The work does not omit the topic of the aesthetic debate that was conducted between proponents of the progressive Second Viennese School and those from reactionary circles at the beginning of the 20th century. Since Grosz's estate does not contain diaries or private correspondences, the letters exchanged with *Universal Edition*, as well as the diary of Arthur Schnitzler, play a crucial role in answering these research questions. The choice of the latter source may seem unusual, but during the research into Wilhelm Grosz's life Schnitzler's diary proved extremely fruitful and useful. This is due to the fact that Grosz spent much time with the Schnitzlers for two years, and thanks to Arthur Schnitzler's detailed, albeit often only note-like, records of his daily activities, it is documented who visited when and where. The Schnitzlers' home served as a meeting place for the cultural elite of the time: intellectuals, artists, writers, journalists, and many more. For the study of Wilhelm Grosz's life, the diary offers valuable insights into whom Grosz encountered there and allows for speculation on how these interactions may have influenced his professional trajectory.

The correspondence with *Universal Edition* reveals, among other things, how much networking was involved in the profession of a composer. Grosz travelled extensively throughout Germany, auditioned at numerous theatres and opera houses, and sought to place his works there. He reported to *Universal Edition* in frequent and detailed letters about his successes and setbacks, often requesting that the publisher send copies of certain works to conductors and performers he had selected.

Wilhelm Grosz has so far received little attention in musicological research. The most extensive prior work was conducted by Carmen Ottner, who focused on Grosz and two other Schreker students (Karol Rathaus and Felix Petyrek). Among other contributions, she analysed the correspondence between Grosz and *Universal Edition* and presented her findings in the book *Was damals als unglaubliche Kühnheit erschien*². Joseph Toltz, a researcher at the University of Sydney, has also engaged intensively with the works of Wilhelm Grosz, curating festivals featuring Grosz's compositions. His primary focus lies on the rediscovery and performance of Grosz's music, much of which had long been forgotten.³ As a student of Franz Schreker, Grosz is mentioned in several publications on Schreker, though rarely examined in greater detail.

The American music publisher G. Schirmer, who is part of the Wise Music Group, has already published several works by Grosz in the "Exilarte Edition": *Serenade für großes*

- 2 Carmen Ottner, *Was damals als unglaubliche Kühnheit erschien. Franz Schrekers Wiener Kompositionsklasse. Studien zu Wilhelm Grosz, Felix Petyrek und Karol Rathaus* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2000).
- 3 Joseph Toltz, "Person. Wilhelm Grosz," *Performing the Jewish Archive*, accessed 5 February 2026, <https://jewishmusicandtheatre.org/people/90>.

Orchester op. 5, Tanz für großes Orchester op. 7, Spanish Rhapsody op. 41 and A Song in Exile. We expect further musical works to be published shortly.

The reappraisal of Austrian music history and the research into the biographies of those who shaped it is an important task that Exilarte has embraced. This publication aims to make a contribution toward that effort.



Wilhelm Grosz, Passport, 26 April 1922
Archive of the Exilarte Center at the mdw Vienna (A-Weaz)

2. WILHELM GROSZ – HIS LIFE

Wilhelm Grosz was born on 11 August 1894 in Vienna into a wealthy family. His father, Bernhard Grosz, owned a jewellery business on the Graben in Vienna's First District, and Wilhelm grew up as an only child. The Grosz family belonged to

the Mosaic-Jewish religious community. Grosz attended the *Gymnasium der Stadt Wien*, an academic secondary school, in Wasagasse in the Ninth District.⁴

2.1. PERIOD OF STUDY

Starting in 1910, Grosz studied composition and counterpoint at the *Wiener Musikakademie* (today "University for Music and Performing Arts Vienna"), receiving a rather traditional education during his first two years of study from Richard Robert, Richard Heuberger, and Robert Fuchs. Robert Fuchs – who taught among others, Gustav Mahler, Franz Schmidt, Franz Schreker, Hugo Wolf, and Alexander Zemlinsky – and Hermann Graedener, the established composition teachers at the *Musikakademie* no longer met the expected standards of teaching quality after great successes. Therefore, the generally conservative leadership of the academy discussed the appointment of Arnold Schönberg to the academy. In the end, Schönberg was offered an elective theoretical

course after completing which students did not graduate from the institution but instead received a "Frequentations-Zeugnis" ("certificate of attendance"). During the academic year 1910/11, Schönberg taught eleven students – among them at least two women (Anna Hellmann and Jenny Steiner⁵). Wilhelm Grosz, however, was not among them.

Schönberg's teaching was very well received, including by Dr. Ernst Krause, a member of the academy's board of trustees. Nonetheless, no agreement could be reached regarding Schönberg's further employment at the *Musikakademie*, and Schönberg declined to continue working there.⁶

"[Ein] länger andauerndes Engagement Schönbergs wäre wohl von bahnbrechender Konsequenz für die Etablierung

4 Cf. Thomas Gayda, "Wilhelm Grosz," in *Lexikon verfolgter Musiker und Musikerinnen der NS-Zeit*, ed. Claudia Maurer Zenck and Peter Petersen (Hamburg, 2010), accessed 13 March 2024, https://www.lexm.uni-hamburg.de/object/lexm_lexmperson_00002583.

5 Cf. Anna Benedikt, "Ich wäre stolz, von Ihnen und Ihren Schülern bis zu einem gewissen Grad anerkannt zu sein als 'Schönberg-Schülerin'." *Arnold Schönbergs Wiener Schülerinnen*, diploma thesis, University of Vienna, 2008, p. 84-85.

6 Cf. Ottner, *Was damals als unglaubliche Kühnheit erschien*, p. 15.

einer avantgardistischen ‚Moderne‘ in Wien gewesen“⁷, as Carmen Ottner observes. In addition to his composition studies at the *Musikakademie*, Grosz pursued a doctoral degree in musicology under Guido Adler at the University of Vienna, which he successfully completed in 1920 with a dissertation entitled *Die Fugenarbeit in Wolfgang Amadeus Mozarts*

Vokal- und Instrumentalwerken (Fugal Writing in Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart’s Vocal and Instrumental Works).

That he was able to dedicate several years to these studies further indicates that he grew up in financially secure circumstances.⁸

2.1.1. Franz Schreker at the *Musikakademie Wien*

After a longer-term engagement of Arnold Schönberg at the *Wiener Musikakademie* failed to materialize, the academy reached an agreement, following a year-long discussion, to appoint a representative of “moderate” modernism: In 1912, Franz Schreker was appointed to the *Musikakademie*.⁹ The proposals to bring both Schreker and Schönberg to the *Vienna Musikakademie* originated primarily from Wilhelm Bopp, one of the leading German music educators of the time. Bopp was determined to modernize the academy, a goal that met with considerable resistance.¹⁰ The musicologist and director of the “Franz Schreker Foundation for Music”, Christopher Hailey, interprets Bopp’s recommendation as follows, “Bopp’s recommendation is a revealing glimpse into the

schizophrenic nature of Vienna’s musical personality, where conservative institutions and progressive leadership, tradition and revolution are often interconnected and mutually dependent.”¹¹ The fact that Schönberg offered a private theory course and Schreker led a composition class at the *Wiener Musikakademie* at a time when both became focal points of controversy in one of Europe’s most conservative cultural centres, further illustrates the transformation underway within Vienna’s cultural institutions.¹² For some contemporaries, Schreker’s acceptance of the position was also a controversial step. In a letter dated 3 September 1912, Schönberg initially expresses words of praise to Schreker concerning his professional development. However, in the second half of the

7 Ottner, *Was damals als unglaubliche Kühnheit erschien*, p. 15. Translation into English: “A longer-term engagement of Schönberg would likely have had groundbreaking consequences for the establishment of an avant-garde ‘modernity’ in Vienna.”

8 Cf. Carmen Ottner, “Wilhelm Grosz (1894 Wien – 1939 New York). Komponist, Pianist, Dirigent. Erste Erfolge in Wien,” in *Ad Fontem Musicae. Thomas Leibnitz zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. Steffan Engl and Andrea Harrandt, *Publikationen des Instituts für Österreichische Musikdokumentation* (Wien: Hollitzer, 2020), p. 312.

9 Cf. Ottner, *Was damals als unglaubliche Kühnheit erschien*, p. 15.

10 Cf. Christopher Hailey, *Franz Schreker (1878-1934). Eine kulturhistorische Biographie* (Wien et al.: Böhlau, 2018) p. 92.

11 Christopher Hailey, *Franz Schreker, 1878-1934. A Cultural Biography* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 56-57.

12 Cf. Hailey, *Franz Schreker (1878-1934)*, p. 91-92.

letter, he voices his concerns:

„Nicht einverstanden bin ich damit [...], daß Sie die Stellung an der Akademie angenommen haben! Ich glaube, Sie hätten besser getan, wie ich, noch einige Zeit zu warten. Aber wer weiß, vielleicht täusche ich mich. Vielleicht war auch das gut!“¹³

According to Hailey, Schreker was able to understand Schönberg's feelings, but he himself harboured less resentment toward Vienna. The prospect of teaching at the conservatory where he had once studied, becoming part of its faculty and, by extension, of the established musical world, caused him considerably less discomfort.¹⁴

2.1.2. Studying with Franz Schreker

In the course of his research, Hailey sought, among other things, to uncover the methods Schreker used in his teaching. To this end, he interviewed more than a dozen surviving Schreker students¹⁵ as well as other contemporaries including widows, children, and acquaintances. What emerged unanimously from these interviews as well as from newspaper reports and letters written by former students was that Schreker was extremely strict when it came to compositional texture and technique. He was also consistently described as an excellent teacher of counterpoint.¹⁶

During the first two years, his students received thorough instruction in modal counterpoint and the various species of

counterpoint. The interviews further revealed that Schreker's approach beyond this stage was rather improvisational. Lessons in form and analysis were based not only on works from the Viennese Classical period but also on compositions by Wagner, Strauss, Reger, and contemporaries such as Debussy and Scriabin.

In the field of composition, Schreker guided his students from small instrumental forms towards larger orchestral works. According to Hailey, however, Schreker's success as a teacher lay less in the structure of his curriculum and more in his personal conception of the teacher's role.¹⁷ "While Schreker's students were given great freedom to explore contemporary

13 Arnold Schönberg, Letter to Franz Schreker, 3 September 1912, Archive of the *Arnold Schönberg Center*, accessed 12 January 2024, <https://repo.schoenberg.at/urn:nbn:at:at-asc-B002862>. Translation into English: "I object to the fact [...] that you accepted the position at the Academy! I believe it would have been better, as I did, to wait a little longer. But who knows, perhaps I'm mistaken. Perhaps it was a good thing after all!"

14 Cf. Hailey, *Franz Schreker (1878-1934)*, p. 93.

15 It should be noted that Hailey lists only male students in this context.

16 Cf. Christopher Hailey, "Schreker, die Schreker-Schule und der Mainstream der Moderne," in "Wohin geht der Flug? Zur Jugend". *Franz Schreker und seine Schüler in Berlin*, ed. Markus Böttgermann and Dietmar Schenk, *Studien und Materialien zur Musikwissenschaft*, vol. 54 (Hildesheim et al.: Olms, 2009), p. 16-17.

17 Cf. Hailey, *Franz Schreker (1878-1934)*, p. 94.

impulses and experiment with their own style, they were expected to work hard,¹⁸ as Hailey observes.

Before long, Schreker's students began to dominate the Academy's composition competitions and stood out with performances of their own works. Wilhelm Grosz was among them. The archive database of the *Wiener Konzerthaus* shows that on 22 March 1915, his *Sonate in A-Dur*¹⁹ was performed by the pianist Helene Lampl-Eibenschütz as part of the second

composition evening featuring students of Franz Schreker.²⁰ This was, in all likelihood, his op. 2, which he had composed in 1913/1914. This information comes from his personal catalogue of works: three small black notebooks in which Wilhelm Grosz, starting in May 1936 in London, retrospectively entered all his compositions in chronological order. He meticulously recorded details about premieres, dates of composition, and publication status, including the names of publishers.

2.1.3. Wilhelm Grosz's Identification as a Schreker Student

Wilhelm Grosz wrote two articles about Franz Schreker for the journal *Anbruch*²¹, the bi-monthly publication for modern music issued by his publisher, *Universal Edition*. In March 1922, by which time Schreker was already serving as director of the Berliner *Akademische Hochschule für Musik*, one of these articles appeared under the title "Aus Schrekers Schule" ("From Schreker's School"). In this article, Grosz first remarked that the term "school" in the title was not entirely appropriate, as Schreker had always been careful to avoid fostering a collective cliché. Grosz went on to state that, although the personality of a master could never remain entirely without influence on his students, Schreker himself had never taken any steps to enforce such an influence. Grosz

could attest to this from personal experience to all complainers and know-it-alls.²² He then went on to name, in his view, Schreker's most productive students: Alois Hába, Felix Petyrek, and Josef Rosenstock.

The second article appeared in 1928, in the issue of *Anbruch* dedicated to Franz Schreker's 50th birthday. Contributions were also made by Arnold Schönberg, Alban Berg, Julius Bittner, several of Schreker's students, as well as colleagues from the theatre and opera world.

In January 1928, *Universal Edition* contacted Grosz with the following request, "sich an dieser Geburtstagsausgabe für den Meister zu beteiligen und uns für das in Aussicht ge-

18 Hailey, *Franz Schreker, 1878-1934*, p. 62.

19 Cf. Estate of Wilhelm Grosz, Catalogue of Works 1913-1934, Archive of the Exilarte Center at the mdw – University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna (A-Weaz).

20 Archive of the *Wiener Konzerthaus*, "Zweiter Kompositionsabend der Schüler Franz Schrekers", 22 March 1915, accessed 18 January 2024, <https://konzerthaus.at/datenbanksuche>.

21 Referred to throughout this study simply as *Anbruch*, although originally titled *Musikblätter des Anbruch* until 1929.

22 Cf. Wilhelm Grosz, "Aus Schrekers Schule," *Anbruch* 4, no. 3-4 (1922), p. 49.

nommene Heft einen Beitrag zur Verfügung zu stellen.“²³ The choice of topic was left to Grosz, though something of a personal nature was especially welcomed.²⁴

Grosz wrote the following about Franz Schreker as a teacher:

„Diese Zeilen gelten dem genialen Erzieher einer ganzen jungen Musikergeneration, die sich zu Beginn seiner Lehrtätigkeit in Wien um Franz Schreker scharten und deren bekannteste Namen heute als ‚Schreker-Schüler‘ überall genannt werden. [...] Ich selbst habe es als Schüler dieser Anstalt erfahren, in welchem totem Geiste man dort vor Schrekers Berufung erzogen wurde und ich entsinne mich noch genau des Tages, an welchem Schreker zum ersten Male in unsere Schule kam und mit Staunen sah, wieviel wir von Regeln und wie wenig wir vom lebendigen Geiste der Musik wußten. An heutigen Verhältnissen gemessen, ist es kaum mehr zu verstehen, daß wir erst unter seiner Anleitung die ersten Fugen im modernen Satz schrieben, daß wir endlich das bisher so gefürchtete und verpönte Wort ‚Dissonanz‘ in seiner wahren Bedeutung kennenlernten [...]. Und was das Schönste

der Lehrmethode Schrekers war, – er zwang keinen seiner Schüler in seine eigene Stilrichtung, ließ jedem seine Entwicklungsfreiheit, seine Eigenheiten, gab jedem die Möglichkeit, sich in seiner eigenen Weise weiter zu entwickeln.“²⁵

Grosz experienced Schreker as a teacher who significantly modernised the institution of the *Wiener Musikakademie* through his curriculum and broadened his students’ horizons. The findings of Christopher Hailey are further supported by Grosz’s own statements regarding Schreker’s teaching style or instructional approach.

Hailey’s observation that Grosz and his fellow students were frequently referred to as “Schreker students” and were strongly associated with their teacher within the cultural landscape of the time can also be confirmed through additional research. Several examples from historical music journals across Europe illustrate this:

In October 1921, the Parisian journal *La Revue musicale* reported on the *Donaueschinger Musiktage*: “Le premier concert était consacré à l’école de Schreker, à laquelle,

23 *Universal Edition*, Letter to Wilhelm Grosz, no. 164, 23 January 1928, Vienna City Library, p. 1. Translation into English: “to participate in this birthday issue for the master and to provide us with a contribution for the forthcoming edition.”

24 Cf. *Universal Edition*, Letter to Wilhelm Grosz, no. 164, 23 January 1928, Vienna City Library, p. 1.

25 Wilhelm Grosz, contribution to “Franz Schreker als Lehrer,” *Anbruch* 10, no. 3–4 (1928), p. 116.

Translation into English: “These lines are dedicated to the brilliant educator of an entire young generation of musicians who, at the beginning of his teaching career in Vienna, gathered around Franz Schreker and whose most prominent names today are universally referred to as ‘Schreker students.’ [...] I myself experienced, as a student of this institution, the lifeless spirit in which we were educated before Schreker’s appointment, and I still clearly remember the day when Schreker first came to our school and, with astonishment, saw how much we knew about rules and how little we understood about the living spirit of music. Measured by today’s standards, it is hardly comprehensible that it was only under his guidance that we wrote our first fugues in a modern style and that we finally learned the true meaning of the previously feared and forbidden word ‘dissonance.’ [...] And the most beautiful aspect of Schreker’s teaching method was that he did not force any of his students into his own stylistic direction. He allowed each of us the freedom to develop individually, to preserve our personal characteristics, and to continue to grow in our own way.”

avec des œuvres de Haba, de Gross²⁶ et de Krenek.²⁷ The article then goes on to present the individual works of the three composers. Grosz himself performed his *Symphonische Variationen für Klavier* op. 9²⁸. At the end of the section on the three Schreker students, music historian and writer Paul Stefan, who worked as a correspondent for several foreign journals, concluded: “Il fait honneur à son maître, et crée une vraie musique de musiciens, aux couleurs fraîches et neuves.”²⁹ It was also Paul Stefan who published an article titled “Music in Post-Empire Austria” in the New York journal *Modern Music* in which he referred to Krenek, Hába, Petyrek, and Grosz as “Schreker’s pupils.”³⁰ The article appeared in 1930, roughly ten years after Schreker had moved to Berlin and after Grosz had stopped studying with him. This demonstrates that the identification and association with Schreker remained strong, at least in public perception. Grosz’s music, too, continued to be associated with Schreker. For example, in 1922, a critic writing under the initials “W.J.” published a review in the journal *Musikalischer Kurier* of Grosz’s stage music for Franz Werfel’s *Spiegelmensch*:

„Zu Werfels magischem Gedicht ‚Spiegelmensch‘ hat Wilhelm Grosz eine Bühnenmusik geschrieben, die durch exotische, an Schreker erinnernde Harmonik, polyphone Klangeffekte und prägnante Rhythmik das Phantastisch-Groteske der Dichtung untermalt.“³¹

Three years later, the journal *Musikbote* reported on his song cycle *An die Geliebte* op. 18. Here again, Grosz is described with the designation “dem Schreker-Schüler” (Schreker’s student). The author of the article writes, “Sie zeigen ebenfalls die typischen Merkmale des modernen Opernmeisters, die in der Klavierbegleitung orchestral und vielstimmig, blühend und empfindungsvoll in Melodik sind.”³²

These examples clearly illustrate that Grosz was perceived as a “Schreker student” even long after his years of study with Schreker had ended.

During his years at the *Wiener Musikakademie*, from 1913 to 1920, Grosz composed eight works to which he assigned opus numbers. These include, for example, the song cycle *Japani-*

26 The name Grosz was often spelled incorrectly.

27 Paul Stefan, “Allemagne. La musique de chambre à Donau-Eschingen,” *La Revue musicale* 11, no. 11 (1921), p. 261. Translation into English: “The first concert was devoted to the Schreker school, with works by Haba, Gross and Krenek.”

28 Cf. Estate of Wilhelm Grosz, Catalogue of Works 1913-1934, Archive of the Exilarte Center at the mdw – University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna (A-Weaz).

29 Paul Stefan, “Allemagne. La musique de chambre à Donau-Eschingen,” *La Revue musicale* (1921), p. 261. Translation into English: “The group did their master great honour and created genuine music by musicians with fresh and new colours.”

30 Paul Stefan, “Music in post-empire Austria,” *Modern Music* 7, no. 4 (1930), p. 21.

31 W. J., “Vermischtes,” *Musikalischer Kurier* 4 (1922), p. 11. Translation into English: “For Werfel’s magical poem ‘Spiegelmensch’, Wilhelm Grosz composed stage music that, with its exotic harmony reminiscent of Schreker, polyphonic sound effects, and striking rhythms, underscores the fantastic and grotesque character of the text.”

32 Anonymous, “Lieder und Gesänge,” *Musikbote* 1, no. 3 (1925), p. 70. Translation into English: “They also exhibit the typical features of the modern opera master: orchestral and polyphonic in the piano accompaniment, blossoming and expressive in the melodic writing.”

scher Frühling op. 3, his four-movement *Sonate für Klavier und Violine* op. 6 and his *Tanz für großes Orchester* op. 7.³³

Toward the end of his studies, some of his works began to receive media attention. For instance, in *Anbruch* in 1919, Bernhard Paumgartner, with whom Grosz had been employed for some time at the *Musikhistorische Zentrale*, published a positive review of Grosz's song cycle op. 3 praising its strong originality and its innovative form and content.³⁴ In the same issue, Rudolf Stephan Hoffmann wrote about Grosz's *Streichquartett* op. 4:

„Es ist darin sehr viel, beinahe zu viel Melodieseligkeit, Freude am schönen Quartettklang, und die reizende Grazie des Intermezzos scheint mir auf Grosz' eigentliche Begabung hinzuweisen: das Anmutige, Witzige, Fein-Unterhaltende. Mit einem Wort: die komische Oper.“³⁵

The *Streichquartett* was premiered on November 27, 1919, by the Waldbauer Quartet in the *Mozartsaal* of the *Wiener Konzerthaus* as part of the first chamber music evening organised by the journal *Anbruch*.³⁶

2.2. WILHELM GROSZ AND THE MUSIKHISTORISCHE ZENTRALE

One institution where Wilhelm Grosz was employed was the *Musikhistorische Zentrale* ("Music History Centre"). Founded in 1917, it was placed under the authority of the *k.u.k. Kriegsministerium* ("Imperial and Royal War Ministry"). Its main purpose was to collect soldiers' songs during the First World War, making it the most extensive collection effort of its kind at the time.

The establishment of this centre took place during wartime, when warring European nations were using culture and its wide-ranging influence on a large scale as a means of propaganda. Although such propaganda was initially somewhat uncoordinated within the weakened Austro-Hungarian Empire, there was a clear awareness of the powerful impact of culture.³⁷

33 Cf. Estate of Wilhelm Grosz, Catalogue of Works 1913-1934, Archive of the Exilarte Center at the mdw – University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna (A-Weaz).

34 Cf. Bernhard Paumgartner, "Besprechung," *Anbruch* 1, no. 3-4 (1919), p. 121.

35 Rudolf Stephan Hoffmann, "Musik in Wien," *Anbruch* 1, no. 3-4 (1919) p. 118. Translation into English: "There is a great deal – almost too much – melodic sweetness in it, a delight in beautiful quartet sound, and the charming grace of the Intermezzo seems to point to Grosz's true talent: the graceful, witty, subtly entertaining. In a word: the comic opera."

36 Cf. Archive of the *Wiener Konzerthaus*, "Erster Kammermusik-Abend der Zeitschrift 'Der Anbruch'", 27 November 1919, accessed 21 May 2024, <https://konzerthaus.at/datenbanksuche>.

37 Cf. Magdalena Bruckmüller-Schindler, "Die Musik im Ersten Weltkrieg. Zwischen Propaganda, Unterhaltung, Völkerverständigung, Nationalismus und Ablenkung," *Zgodovinski časopis. Historical Review* 69, no. 1-2 (2015), p. 125.

Guido Adler wrote three treatises on the topic of World War and music. The sentence that stands out as the most prominent statement from these is, “[Die] Kunst ist stärker als jede Waffe, sie geht ihre Wege kraft innerer Gewalt”³⁸. Adler assigned German and Austrian music a prominent role within the international cultural landscape, due to the rich musical heritage of Mozart, Haydn, Beethoven, or Schubert. However, Magdalena Bruckmüller-Schindler says, “Man würde allerdings zu kurz greifen, würde man Adler unterstellen, lediglich die Überlegenheit der österreichischen Musik gegenüber dem Feind und den übrigen Nationen der Monarchie zu propagieren.”³⁹ Indeed, according to her, Adler’s writings also highlight music’s potential for connecting peoples.⁴⁰ In response to the growing nationalism that threatened to destabilise the monarchy, efforts were made to create and foster a sense of Austrian patriotism. The War Ministry therefore commissioned the Phonogram Archive to record soldiers’ songs in all the languages spoken within the already multilingual monarchy. The aim was for Austrian and Hungarian officers to learn and sing these songs in the various languages. Starting in 1916,

the *Musikhistorische Zentrale* began building its collection, as Bruckmüller-Schindler says, “wieder unter dem Aspekt des gemeinsamen Musizierens aber auch, damit aus den Wirren des Krieges wenigstens etwas Brauchbares, etwas, was Bestand hat, entstehe. Bezeichnenderweise intensivierten sich die Anstrengungen vor allem erst dann, als die Monarchie ihrem nicht mehr aufzuhaltenden Untergang entgegenschah.”⁴¹

The *Musikhistorische Zentrale* was headed by the Austrian conductor, composer, musicologist, and educator Bernhard Paumgartner. The collected soldiers’ songs were regarded as highly valuable materials from patriotic, artistic, and ethnographic perspectives, which should be saved from oblivion. Paumgartner was supported in this collection effort by well-known musicians, who were his friends⁴². Many of them had had no prior experience with similar tasks but were either recruited through intermediaries or relieved from frontline service by their employment at the *Musikhistorische Zentrale*. The following individuals were directly employed: industrialist and folk song researcher Konrad Mautner, music writer Alfons Török, folk song researcher and teacher Raimund

38 Cited in, Bruckmüller-Schindler, “Die Musik im Ersten Weltkrieg”, p. 125. Translation into English: “Art is stronger than any weapon; it follows its path through its own inner force”.

39 Bruckmüller-Schindler, “Die Musik im Ersten Weltkrieg”, p. 126-127. Translation into English: “However, it would be an oversimplification to accuse Adler of merely propagating the superiority of Austrian music over the enemy and the other nations of the monarchy.”

40 Cf. Bruckmüller-Schindler, “Die Musik im Ersten Weltkrieg”, p. 127.

41 Bruckmüller-Schindler, “Die Musik im Ersten Weltkrieg,” p. 128. Translation into English: “Again from the perspective of making music together, but also so that from the chaos of the war at least something useful, something lasting, might emerge. Tellingly, the efforts gained real intensity only when the monarchy was already heading toward its inevitable collapse.”

42 The research revealed exclusively male staff members.

Zoder, and Felix Petyrek, a Schreker student and fellow student of Grosz, who would dedicate himself to the study of folk music throughout his life.⁴³

Somewhat later, Alois Hába and Wilhelm Grosz also joined the project. For the Hungarian part of the collection, Béla Bartók and Zoltán Kodály were commissioned.

A box of source materials on the *Musikhistorische Zentrale* is preserved in the *Österreichisches Staatsarchiv* ("Austrian State Archive"), including several letters exchanged between Paumgartner and Bartók. In August 1917, Bartók reported on his experiences and difficulties with the project. Since it was not easy to motivate soldiers to sing songs during their limited free time, he suggested offering rewards to particularly enthusiastic participants:

„Vielleicht einen freien Abend, oder Tabak, oder Brot oder Geld oder sonst irgendetwas. Dann würden alle um vieles eifriger bemüht sein, all ihren Liederschatz darzubieten. Die Erfahrung hat mir gezeigt, dass nach 1-2 Stunden der anfangs gezeigte gute Wille erschlapft, manche gehen – trotz des fehlenden Befehls – davon, die anderen erklären schließlich, sie können nichts mehr und sind müde und hungrig usw.“⁴⁴

43 Cf. Eva Maria Hois, "Der Große Krieg als 'echter Segenbringer'. Über das Sammeln von Soldatenliedern während des Ersten Weltkriegs," in *Erster Weltkrieg. Die bewahrte Erinnerung*, ed. Johanna Rachinger, *biblios. Beiträge zu Buch, Bibliothek und Schrift* (Wien: Phibos Verlag, 2014), p. 53-54.

44 Béla Bartók, Letter to *Musikhistorische Zentrale*, no. 495, 4 August 1917, AT-OeStA/KA ZSt KM Intern 99 Gruppe XI (*Musikhistorische Zentrale*), p. 2. Translation into English: "Perhaps a free evening, or tobacco, or bread or money or something else. That would make everyone much more eager to present their entire song repertoire. My experience has shown that after one or two hours, the initial goodwill fades; some leave—despite not being ordered to do so—while others claim they know no more songs and that they are tired and hungry, etc."

45 Cf. Béla Bartók, Letter to *Musikhistorische Zentrale*, no. 495, 4 August 1917, AT-OeStA/KA ZSt KM Intern 99 Gruppe XI (*Musikhistorische Zentrale*), p. 2-3.

46 The military rank held by Wilhelm Grosz was "Einjährig-Freiwilliger Titular-Korporal" ("One-Year Volunteer, Titular Corporal"). Military service as a One-Year Volunteer was available to conscripts who had completed the Matura (school-leaving examination) and, in peacetime, came with several advantages. These included a shortened period of military service—limited to one year—as well as the opportunity to attain the rank of reserve officer.

He also emphasised that such work could only produce scientifically usable material if carried out by trained music folklorists. According to him, even the Slovak and Hungarian melodies which were relatively easy to notate presented significant rhythmic challenges when it came to transcription.⁴⁵

How Grosz came to be employed at the *Musikhistorische Zentrale* and what his exact duties there entailed cannot be fully reconstructed.

A letter can be found in the *Österreichisches Staatsarchiv* whose sender is not identified. It concludes with "Der Musikreferent" ("The Music Officer"). The heading reads "Dr. Paumg. zur Begutachtung" ("To Dr. Paumg. for assessment"). The document proposes the employment of Wilhelm Grosz at the *Musikhistorische Zentrale* and recommends him for the position. The full text of the letter will be transcribed and included below. A few abbreviations, which likely refer to military ranks, are illegible and will be marked in the transcript as "[unreadable]".

„Einj. Fwl. tit. Korpl.“⁴⁶ Wilhelm Grosz würde sich für die angesprochene Verwendung bestens eignen, da er nicht nur sehr musikalisch, sondern als Kompositionsschüler

der k.k. Akademie f. Musik und darst. Kunst in Wien und Mitglied des Musikhistorischen Institutes der k.k. Universität die nötige theoretische Vorbildung in vollstem Maße besitzt. Da der Bittsteller im Augenblick durch Krankheit [„durch Krankheit“ durchgestrichen und „sich als Rekonvaleszent im [unleserlich] Heim Wien XIV, Selzergasse“ mit Bleistift hinzugefügt] befindet und vorl. auf 2 Monate für eine Verwendung bei der Armee im Felde nicht in Betracht kommen kann, beantrage ich, daß Einj. Fwl. tit. Korpl. Wilhelm Grosz schon jetzt der Propaganda Gruppe des KP.Q.⁴⁷ zugeteilt und mir zur Hilfsdienstleistung beigegeben werde. Während dieser Zeit würde er von mir mit der nötigen Instruktion zum Sammeln der Soldatenlieder versehen werden und könnte in den Räumen der M.H.Z. (II. Taborstraße 18, IV) den Vorarbeiten obliegen. Korp. Grosz käme für die jetzt sehr wichtige Sammelarbeit bei den [unleserlich] in Wien in Betracht, ferner

für die sehr umfangreichen und wichtigen Vorarbeiten zu dem großen historischen Konzert der MHZ., welches laut 10. K. W. Abteilung Nr. 2053 / wg. am 15. Dez. d. J. Großen Konzerthausaale stattfinden soll, in Betracht. Mit Hinblick auf den nahen Termin des Konzertes bitte ich die Kommandierung des Einj. Fwl. tit. Korpl. Grosz sobald als möglich zu veranlassen und ihn nach erfolgter Kommandierung zum [unleserlich] in der MH.Z. stellig zu machen. Der Musikreferent ⁴⁸

In a photograph bearing the inscription “Willy als einjährig Freiwilliger” (“Willy as a one-year volunteer”) on the back, Grosz is depicted as a young soldier in a photo studio. However, the year the photograph was taken is not recorded anywhere.

A letter dated 28 September 1917, which may have been a response to the petitioner, was typewritten and reads as follows:

47 “Kriegspressequartier” (“War Press Office”).

48 Unknown sender, Letter to Bernhard Paumgartner, no. 631, 30 August 1917, AT-OeStA/KA ZSt KM Intern 99 Gruppe XI (Musikhistorische Zentrale), p. 1. Translation into English: “Einj. Fwl. tit. Korpl. [“One-Year Volunteer, Titular Corporal”] Wilhelm Grosz would be ideally suited for the intended assignment, as he is not only highly musical but, as a composition student at the *k.k. Akademie für Musik und darstellende Kunst* in Vienna and a member of the *Musikhistorisches Institut* at the *k.k. Universität*, also possesses the necessary theoretical training to the fullest extent. Since the petitioner is currently due to illness [“due to illness” crossed out and replaced in pencil with, “recovering as a convalescent at the [unreadable] home, Vienna XIV, Selzergasse”], and for the time being cannot be considered for deployment with the army in the field for two months, I request Einj. Fwl. tit. Korpl. Wilhelm Grosz be assigned immediately to the Propaganda Group of the KP.Q. and placed under my supervision for auxiliary service. During this time, he would receive the necessary instruction from me on how to collect soldiers’ songs and could carry out preliminary work in the rooms of the M.H.Z. (II. Taborstrasse 18, IV). Corporal Grosz would be suitable for the currently very important collection work among the [unreadable] in Vienna, as well as for the extensive and significant preparatory tasks for the major historical concert of the MHZ, which, according to the 10th War Department, No. 2053 / wg., is scheduled to take place on 15 December of this year in the *Großer Konzerthausaal*. Given the approaching date of the concert, I kindly request that the assignment of Einj. Fwl. tit. Korpl. Grosz be arranged as soon as possible and that, following his reassignment, he be reported to the [unreadable] at the M.H.Z. for duty. *Der Musikreferent*”



Grosz as a young soldier
Archive of the Exilarte Center
at the mdw Vienna (A-Weaz)



From left to right: Raimund Zoder, Konrad Mautner, Felix Petyrek, Heinrich Knöll, Maximilian Morberger, Alfons Török, Wilhelm Grosz, photography by Franz Löwy
© Volkskultur Niederösterreich – Niederösterreichisches Volksliedarchiv, BA 1481

„Das Gesuch des E. Frw. Tit. Korpals Wilhelm Gross [sic] des k.k. Res. F. K. R. 201 Batt. 6 um Verwendung im Musikreferat des Kriegspressequartiers wurde zwecks Sammlung von Soldatenliedern im Bereich der Isonzoarmee bereits weitergeleitet. Nach seinem Eintreffen dortselbst möge man sich mit der Propagandagruppe des Kriegspressequartier wegen seiner Verwendung in Verbindung setzen. [unleserliche Unterschrift]“⁴⁹

Unlike in the case of Alois Hába, no official document has survived that confirms Grosz's employment at the *Musikhistorische Zentrale*. However, Grosz is consistently mentioned as a staff member in the literature on the *Musikhistorische Zentrale*, and a photograph from the *Niederösterreichisches Volksarchiv* also depicts Wilhelm Grosz among the employees of the institution.

Furthermore, Grosz was mentioned in the *Neue Freie Presse* in connection with the “Historischen Konzerts” (“historical

concert”) referenced in the previously quoted letter, which took place on 12 January 1918 in the Grand Hall of the *Wiener Konzerthaus*:

„Ein bosnisches Lied ‚Muß denn kommen die Nacht‘ mit fast subtil zu nennenden schwermütigen Wendungen hat in der kunstreichen Fassung, die es erhalten hat (Wilhelm Grosz) beinahe ganz den Volksliedcharakter eingebüßt.“⁵⁰

After the *Musikhistorische Zentrale* was dissolved, the successor states presumably took possession of the collections. The German-language song material was largely destroyed. As previously mentioned, most of the remaining sources from the *Musikhistorische Zentrale* are now housed in the *Österreichisches Staatsarchiv*, although all of the collected soldiers' songs – likely numbering several thousand – are missing.⁵¹

49 Unknown sender, Letter to *Musikhistorische Zentrale*, no. 645, 28 September 1917, AT-OeStA/KA ZSt KM Intern 99 Gruppe XI (*Musikhistorische Zentrale*), p. 1. Austrian State Archive.: “The request of one-year volunteer titled Corporal Wilhelm Gross [sic] of the k.k. Res. F. K. R. 201 Batt. 6, for deployment in the Music Section of the War Press Office has already been forwarded for the purpose of collecting soldiers' songs in the area of the Isonzo Army. Upon his arrival there, the Propaganda Group of the War Press Office should be contacted regarding his employment. [Unreadable signature]”

50 Anonymous, “Historisches Konzert. Veranstaltet von der musikhistorischen Zentrale des k.u.k. Kriegsministeriums,” *Neue Freie Presse*, 13 January 1918, p. 12. Translation into English: “A Bosnian song, ‘Muß denn kommen die Nacht,’ with turns of phrase that might almost be called subtle in their melancholy, has, in the artful arrangement it has received (Wilhelm Grosz), almost entirely lost its original folk song character.”

51 Cf. Eva Maria Hois, “*Musikhistorische Zentrale (MHZ)*,” in *Oesterreichisches Musiklexikon online*, ed. Barbara Boisits, last modified 20 November 2006, accessed 21 May 2024, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1553/0x001372dc>.

2.3. GROSZ'S CAREER AFTER COMPLETING HIS STUDIES

After completing his studies at the *Wiener Musikakademie*, Grosz initially accepted an unpaid position as a répétiteur at the National Theatre in Mannheim, where he subsequently worked as a conductor during the 1920/21 season.⁵² Why he remained in Mannheim for only one season is unknown. The following entry from Arthur Schnitzler's diary dated 20 June 1921 comments on the end of Grosz's engagement in Mannheim: "Wir soupiren im Hotel; – an der Haltestelle theilt sie mir mit, daß G. seit vorgestern hier; in M. seine Stellung hingeschmissen."⁵³ The pronoun "sie" ("she") refers to Olga Schnitzler, with whom Grosz – often abbreviated as "G." in Schnitzler's diary – had an affair at the time. Thus, Schnitzler writes that Grosz had "quit" his position. What this wording, which needs to be evaluated with consideration of the turbulent times in the Schnitzlers' marriage, implies, is open to interpretation, as there is no indication in surviving sources

accessible to scholarship why Grosz's employment in Mannheim was so brief. In the so-called "Marchivum", the digital archive of the city of Mannheim, the theatre programmes of the performances conducted by Wilhelm Grosz are accessible. The first such programme dates from 11 December 1920. It was the premiere of the "Kunstmärchen" ("literary fairy tale") *Der kleine Muck. Ein Weihnachtsmärchen in einem Vorspiel und sechs Bildern* by Kurt Krüger, with music by Pyotr Tchaikovsky.⁵⁴ In the same month, there were ten additional performances of this piece. From January 1921 onward, performances under the event title "Wandlungen der deutschen Volkstänze: Tanz-Abend"⁵⁵ followed, as well as several productions of the singspiel *Das Dreimäderlhaus* by Heinrich Berté, with music by Franz Schubert⁵⁶ and *Das Dorf ohne Glocke* by Eduard Künneke, the ballet *Coppélia* by Léo Delibes, and the operetta *Die schöne Galathée* by Franz von

52 Cf. Gayda, "Wilhelm Grosz," in *Lexikon verfolgter Musiker und Musikerinnen der NS-Zeit*, ed. Claudia Maurer Zenck and Peter Petersen (Hamburg, 2010), accessed 13 March 2024, https://www.lexm.uni-hamburg.de/object/lexm_lexmperson_00002583.

53 Arthur Schnitzler, *Tagebuch. Digitale Edition*, Monday, 20 June 1921, accessed 22 January 2024, https://schnitzler-tagebuch.acdh.oeaw.ac.at/entry__1921-06-20.html. Translation into English: "We dine at the hotel; – at the tram stop she tells me that G. has been here since the day before yesterday; in M. he quit his position."

54 Cf. Marchivum, *Der kleine Muck. Weihnachtsmärchen in einem Vorspiel und sechs Bildern*, 11 December 1920, accessed 13 March 2024, <https://druckschriften-digital.marchivum.de/theaterzettel/content/titelformat/656160>.

55 Cf. Marchivum, *Wandlungen der deutschen Volkstänze. Tanz-Abend*, 14 January 1921, accessed March 3, 2024, <https://druckschriften-digital.marchivum.de/theaterzettel/content/titelformat/656218>.

56 Cf. Marchivum, *Das Dreimäderlhaus. Singspiel in drei Akten*, 16 January 1921, accessed 13 March 2024, <https://druckschriften-digital.marchivum.de/theaterzettel/content/titelformat/656221>.